

II. ECOLOGY

SETTLEMENTS AND HOUSES

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Settlements.—One of the most characteristic features of Timbira culture—in the natives' own opinion—is the circular village plan. So long as their aboriginal life retains a spark of vitality they cling to this mode of settlement, which is most intimately bound up with their socioceremonial organization. Notwithstanding their ignorance of Indian usage, the Baptist missionaries in Brazil correctly recognized the social significance of this feature and did their utmost to effect its abandonment; for as long as it survives the ancient social order, too, lives on, and within that there is no place for missionaries. When the Canella transplanted their village to the site of Ponto in 1924, the Indian agent in Barra do Corda likewise tried to convince them that straight streets were far more beautiful, but he had the good sense to desist when the Indians vigorously spurned the proposal.

361
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Snethlage has it that Pereira do Lago ascribes circular villages to the Gamella of Vianna, and Ferreira Gomes to the Krahô', while Ribeiro is supposed to credit a semilunar form to the Timbira of Goyaz.⁷²⁴ Actually Pereira merely reports round Gamella huts, without saying a word about their arrangement. Ribeiro, on the other hand, after stating that the Timbira encampments and settlements were invariably circular, goes on to say: "Alguns Índios de Goyaz edificam em meia lua." This doubtless refers to the horseshoe shape of Šavánte-Šerénte villages. Finally, Ferreira Gomes, though mentioning circular settlements for the Kréyé (then still near Imperatriz), never got to see any Krahô', as he explicitly states: "... tres aldeas de indigenas mansos os quaes não foram vistos por mim estes indigenas são de duas nações, carauá e chavantes."⁷²⁵

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The village (krí) site must fulfill the following conditions:

1. It must be level. Since level ground of adequate extent is hardly to be found on the slope in the direction of the watercourses, the villages are all situated on the level of the steppe, usually at the end of a spur projecting into the angle between two converging streams.
2. The ground should be neither rocky nor sandy, but represent an outcrop of hard clay, for on sand or rubble barefoot folk cannot dance in comfort, especially if they indulge with Timbira perseverance.
3. The site must not be too far from the water supply, though a difference of a kilometer does not matter.
4. There must be an adequate *galeria* forest near by to provide clearings for a number of years. When the annual tree-felling has deforested the land to the distance of, say, twelve kilometers from the village, the settlement is transferred to a new site that has a sufficiency of timber in the vicinity.
5. Finally, attention is paid to freedom from fever, in which respect the Timbira steppes are, as a rule, favorably situated.

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Ponto may serve as a typical steppe Timbira settlement. To be sure, its form lacks the geometrical perfection credited to it in Fróes Abreu's plan, and this author likewise fails to indicate that the village is elevated above the plain.⁷²⁶ In 1930 it comprised thirty-one houses (ikré), all of whose broad sides faced the plaza. The diameter of the circle was 300 m. Along the front façade of the houses there extends all around the plaza a street (kríkapé') of irregular width; it shall henceforth be designated as the "boulevard" (fig. 1). Its minimum width may be set at about 7 m. In front of the houses of the two vu'té' girls⁹ (see p. 92), which always lie opposite each other, the boulevard expands into a small dance ground. Because of

⁷²⁴ Snethlage, *Nordostbras. Ind.*, 152.

⁷²⁵ Ferreira Gomes, *Itinerario*, 490, 495.

⁷²⁶ Fróes Abreu, *Terra das Palmeiras*, 99, 168.

Nimuendajú: The Eastern Timbira

113

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scene over before several other Clowns came running with a small, gnarled tree from which intestines, pieces of wood, but also some slices of good meat were suspended, of which the women likewise took possession.

On the following day the boys went hunting and killed a number of small birds and steppe rats. They tied their spoils to a tree, dragged it to the plaza, and set it upright, while the little girls came running from all sides to pillage it. Other boys had tied their game to the tip of their long tuft of hair and ran across the plaza, chased by the girls, who finally despoiled them of the booty.

GROWING GIRLS

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At the age of boys beginning to organize, the girls already assist their mothers at home and in the plantations and mostly excel them as dancers and singers in the plaza. Public opinion exacts competence in both spheres. A girl unfit for domestic and farming labor will not readily find a husband; but the collaboration of girls in the chanting and dancing that is indispensable for every festival and ceremonial is considered equally important. No Timbira mother would restrain her daughter from attending a dance on the ground of work to be done at home or in the plots. If there are too few girls in the plaza for a dance, the truants are publicly reproved by the elders, who may send specially delegated men to fetch them out of their maternal homes. One of these messengers advances the tip of his sword-club toward the girl, who is obliged to clasp it, and he then leads her by the club to the plaza. Such treatment may be accorded to girls no older than ten, and at about twelve both sexes are in the thick of the manifold socioceremonial life of age classes, festive societies, and other units.

SOCIAL RELATIONS OF THE SEXES

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Before discussing the relations of the sexes during and prior to wedlock, I wish to state explicitly what is sufficiently apparent from the description of social structure: Neither sex considers the other inferior; the sexes have distinct functions, not higher and lower ones. Of course there are no feminine chiefs or councilors, and the religious ceremonies on behalf of the commonweal are always performed by men. Further, there is no preponderantly feminine organization. On the other hand, women not only own dwellings and plantations, but also have a claim on the children, and except in warfare nothing is undertaken without feminine participation, whence the *vu'te'* institution (p. 92), the girl associates in the festive societies and the boys' initiation (p. 95 f.), and the resulting membership of women in the *hamrén* (p. 97 f.). There is but a single wholly masculine organization, that of the King Vultures; and this is due to their comprising all the honorary chiefs, which automatically excludes women since female chiefs are unknown. The two types of formalized friendship likewise embrace both sexes, even though the circumstances in which the *kwq'nō* bond is established restrict the number of females capable of entering it (p. 104).

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In contrast to tribes with masculine societies for terrorizing women or with other methods of frightening them,¹⁰⁰ the *Ramkō'* *kamekra* seem to be above all interested in a merry comradeship of the two sexes. This attitude rests on the manifest appreciation of feminine personality. If a girl or woman differs in opinion from a man and agreement is hopeless, the matter is allowed to rest; it would be regarded as mean and ridiculous for a man to get angry, let alone try coercion. All relations rest on free consent within the tribal code. Accordingly rape was unknown, the

¹⁰⁰ Nimuendajú and Lowie, *The Associations of the Serénte*, 415.

Nimuendajú: *The Eastern Timbira*

129

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[837] (p. 179). A Neobrazilian is naturally struck by the Timbira's lack of that jealousy so excessively developed in his own society and practically the basis of sex life there. From this difference he draws conclusions for the Indians that would hold for himself.

CHARITY

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837 Yet the Ramkô'kamekra women unquestionably have an ideal of conjugal fidelity; without it, indeed, the grass widow's seclusion and mourning would be inconceivable, nor would adultery figure as a ground for divorce. Couples who have grown old together without ever separating are held up as paragons for the younger generation, and there is a fair number of such models in the tribe. The failure of many to attain the ideal does not disprove its existence. What characterizes Timbira in contrast to Neobrazilian notions of matrimony is the recognition of cases in which extramarital intercourse is not merely allowed but reckoned laudable and honorific, for example the exchange of wives by two kwu'nô or the role of the two precentresses in peacemaking. Further, since the child's welfare is a primary consideration, a mother must confess extramarital relations during the period of pregnancy in order that the adulterer may be secluded synchronously with the husband, both being thereby publicly acknowledged as fathers. This custom presupposes the husband's ability to bear the avowal with equanimity—an idea utterly opposed to Neobrazilian sentiment.

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183 Finally such an attitude is possible only among such a people as the Ramkô'kamekra, where the individual seems to exist mainly in order to function in a dozen distinct units in accordance with traditional prescriptions, where the supreme social commandment is at any cost to avoid internal dissension. The Timbira define "good" and "bad" men accordingly. He is "bad" who quarrels with tribesmen, insists on personal privileges, will not yield his claims—in short, acts like a kupê (Neobrazilian). A "good" man is one who, irrespective of the obvious justice of his case, meets another halfway, not from fear, but in order to avoid dispute; *that* is acting "like us Indians." Tompey (to agree) is the highest social virtue. Further, the ceremonial from which no person can absent himself in many ways forces disputants into cooperative activities.

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593 Mere suspicion is not held adequate to raise the charge of adultery, which can be established only by an eyewitness. Whenever the subject is broached, the first question asked is, "Have you seen it yourself?" The general aversion to disputes discourages informants: anyone who catches someone else's spouse in *flagrante delicto* maintains a discreet silence. Moreover, if the affair comes under discussion, this is restricted to the spouses and their kin; the fellow culprit is never, so far as I know, summoned for a reckoning.

I took cognizance of a fair number of occurrences of adultery. One day Wakái, a hapin of mine, had an irrefutable proof of his wife Kañô's infidelity. Taking his belongings, he left the house, halted in the space in front of it, and declared why he was acting thus. He spoke just loud enough to be heard by the neighbors, but with calm moderation. Kañô was genuinely grieved over this consequence of her intrigue. No sooner had her husband departed than she was never seen outside her dwelling. Her relatives, the man's age class, and sundry others—I myself was asked to collaborate as Wakái's hapin—all exerted themselves to patch up the difficulty and a week later the two were peaceably reunited.

In another case, a woman named Pyékára was a notorious adultress, but her husband, otherwise no weakling, ignored her waywardness because he was afraid of otherwise being separated from his dearly beloved child.

Nimuendajú: The Eastern Timbira

139

526 home of their deceased best runner, who died on a journey a year ago; there they indulge in a brief lament. Then—lest anyone imagine they were exhausted by their bit of exercise—they once more take up their logs and run around the boulevard with them, or run an ordinary race by twos, or a relay race. Not until then do they take a bath.

535 After every major race a solo dance is indicated. Properly it devolves on one of the four *ëŋ'kate*, but very often some other man who happens to feel like it assumes the rattle girdle and with it their role. In addition he has for insignia his club and a special dance staff or at least an arrow which he grasps with both hands and holds aloft in horizontal position. Usually he begins in the plaza, then trots on the radial path to a house, in front of which he spends several seconds singing and dancing, whereupon he returns to the plaza by the same path, again dances there, uses the next radial path, and continues thus till he has danced before each and every one of the thirty houses and is then as a rule completely exhausted. However, it often happens that the performer merely dances from house to house along the boulevard without each time returning to the plaza. The accompanying solo songs illustrate the sharp distinction the *Ramkô'kamekra* draw between piano and forte. Snethlage mentions a solo dancer who alternately balanced his dance staff on his finger tips, his nose, or chin.²² This is certainly not a fixed custom; I have never witnessed it.

[533] Notwithstanding the well-nigh superhuman exertions made I have not observed any detriment to the health of the log bearers; nor does the ensuing bath prove unsalutary. On the other hand, in any race of considerable extent there are many minor foot injuries due to tree stumps and thorns.

526 And now we come to the feature that remains incomprehensible to the Neobrazilian and leads to his constantly ascribing ulterior motives to this Indian game: The victor and the others who have desperately exerted themselves to the bitter end receive not a word of praise, nor are the losers and outstripped runners subject to the least censure; there are neither triumphant nor disgruntled faces. The sport is an end in itself, not the means to satisfy personal or group vanity. Not a trace of jealousy or animosity is to be detected between the teams. Each participant has done his best because he likes to do so in a log race. Who turns out to be the victor or loser makes as little difference as who has eaten most at a banquet. Only the lazy-bones who plays truant when a race is on becomes the target of blame and mockery. The term *ëukaká* (p. 119) is considered very derogatory, especially when applied by a woman to a man.

526 The major log races held at the close of the annual festivals, above all at *pepyé*, invariably arouse the interest of the entire village. The ordinary ones create much less excitement. When men in a group return from some big hunting trip or other labor, they generally enter the village by way of a log race. If the participants are few in number, they simply chop off two tree limbs corresponding to their strength. Though such races proceed quietly and unobtrusively, the entrance into the village nevertheless always lures a number of interested spectators to the doors of their houses.

526 At one of the great races it is difficult to supervise individual achievements. To be sure, a competent class-leader will try to regulate the procedure, but it may well happen that a good runner overexerts himself at the very start or at a particularly unfavorable stage of the course so as to fall far behind, while an inferior racer manages to save his strength for the finish. With the general enthusiasm and agitation, artificially heightened by the noise, there is little scope for cold, calculating

²² Snethlage, *Nordostbras.*, 179.

Nimuendajú: The Eastern Timbira

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834 Properly the commandant-in-chief ought to punish incontinence, but such disciplinary action was rare and, in general, Kopkré's choice for this important office proved rather unfortunate. Contrary to ancient custom, a fair number of pepyé were already married, and these often sneaked off to their wives instead of spending the night in their cells. Anciently, transgressors with wanton women would have been forced to eat large doses of pepper; and the Apá'nyekra seated the guilty couple publicly in the plaza, which was reckoned a disgrace. In 1933 the commandant could not strictly enforce the rule because he himself was an offender; one night I myself caught not indeed his wife, but a wanton slipping into his cell. The deputy was far more scrupulous; during the entire period of segregation he slunk off only on two or three nights to caress an infant daughter in his young wife's house.

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867 At intervals of several days the pepyé secretly met at night in the courtyard of the deputy or, at times, of the commandant—usually because of some gross breach of the rules. The penalty, if inflicted, consisted of flogging by the errand boys acting under the deputy's orders after a secret agreement between him and the commandant. The errand boys accordingly always appear in public with their rods, which are about 1.30 m. long, very thin, and flexible. At the meetings both the commandant and his deputy uttered lengthy admonitions and tirades mainly bearing on the rules of seclusion and marriage. Maintenance of the former insures a successful internment, that is, one by which the pepyé rapidly acquire, in native belief, the strength of men, being enabled to pit themselves in sport against the next older class—a matter of honor. The marriage regulations loom large, because formerly most of the pepyé married soon after the festival and moved into the houses of their mothers-in-law. In matrimony, too, the Indians' supreme rule is to avoid quarrels, let alone brawls, which were expressly branded as setting a bad example for the children, who are to be educated in the traditional mores. A spouse's industry is represented as prerequisite to a happy union, but the harangues also refer to the faults of some girls, such as frivolity, laziness, and mendacity. Further, the lectures extend to the proper behavior toward kin, especially toward the wife's relatives, to the formalized friendship bonds, and to the prerogatives of elders, who are always to be treated with reverence. Thievery and lying are denounced.

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881 Actual conduct, it must be admitted, more or less deviates from the ideals preached, nevertheless the reality of the standards is certain; and to judge from the spontaneous remarks made to me by various pepyé, at least under the influence of the ceremonial setting, many of the youths took them very seriously.

The commandant is responsible to the council for the demeanor and prosperity of his pepyé, being blamed if the young men fall short of the standards, physical and moral, at the close of their initiation.

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527 Between 3 A.M. and 10 P.M. the catcher makes about five daily circuits through all the houses of internment. He carries a thick, heavy cane, 1.65 m. in length, not club-fashion under his arm, but so as to lean on it in walking. In the daytime he takes his stand before the cell, at night before the door of the house of retreat, facing the plaza, and remains silent for one or two minutes, both hands laid on the upper end of his cane. Then, rocking his body to and fro, he loudly utters his "hinkó" cry, "hó! hó-ó!" At the last "ó!" he stamps with his right foot, waits immobile for another minute, and then passes on to the next house.

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293 Besides the scratchers (pl. 35, b), shared with all other persons who for some reason have to go into a ceremonial retreat, the pepyé have two objects peculiar to their seclusion and made only during this period.

Their club (koppo) is a narrow board, 4-6 cm. wide and 60-112 cm. long, with the